

# Restrictions ended, agencies look back on a relatively calm 2016 fire season

Numbers, types of conflagrations pale in comparison to sultry 2015 season

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

The recent removal of restrictions in place to curb activities that could cause outdoor fires has officially drawn the fire season of 2016 to a close, a season perhaps only remarkable in comparison to its predecessor.

South Lane County Fire and Rescue Chief John Wooten said last week that the 2016 fire season was "nothing compared to last year," an extremely dry season that featured major conflagrations throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Within the 800-mile boundaries of the South Lane district, Wooten said firefighters dealt with but one threatening fire, that which burned a little over three acres in a wooded area on Mt. David on Wednesday, Aug. 24. Later that week, police and fire personnel responded to reports of a fire in a restroom at Bohemia Park, then dealt with a brush fire set intentionally near the Row River Trail outside Walmart.

Three 15-year olds were subsequently arrested in response to those two fires, arrests that Wooten believed had curbed the rash of arson happening in the area.

"The Cottage Grove Police Department arrested three individuals, and once they were arrested, those kinds of fires stopped," Wooten said. "That leads me to believe that they found the right individuals."

The Lane County Sheriff's Office is also still investigat-



A helicopter belonging to timber company Weyerhaeuser pours retardant onto a fire on Mt. David on Wednesday, Aug. 24.

ing what it believes to be arson fires at homes in Saginaw and on Cedar Creek Road near Cottage Grove Reservoir, Wooten said, though statewide there were only two major wildfire conflagrations in 2016. The Oregon Department of Forestry reported 56 fires on forested lands it protects in the Western Lane District; Wooten also gave credit to cooperation between South Lane and ODF for the speedy

response that helped extinguish the Mt. David blaze.

Fire regulations ended on the Umpqua National Forest on Wednesday, Oct. 5, and the Forest Service reported that the 2016 fire season consisted of 40 fires that burned a total of 8.3 acres. Of these, 13 were caused by lightning, with the remainder caused by humans.

"An astonishing 21 fires were started by abandoned campfires,

a strong reminder of the importance of making sure campfires are cold to the touch before leaving," USFS' Jennifer Taylor wrote via news release last week.

The Douglas Forest Protective Association also ended its regulations last week, announcing that the 2016 fire season began on June 8 and lasted 120 days. Firefighters suppressed 75 fires, which burned 120 acre on the Douglas District, with the largest fire of the year being the Highway 138 West fire on Sept. 13 that burned 62 acres. Lightning reportedly sparked one fire, which accounted for 1/10 acre burned, whereas 74 human-caused fires burned the bulk of this summer's acreage.

These numbers are a far cry from the brutal 2015 season, which ODF called a "witches' brew of drought, hot weather and dry lightning," in a summary report that pointed out that these conditions spawned more than 2000 wildfires in Oregon alone, fires that consumed "some 631,000 acres of forest and rangeland."

According to the ODF news release, the agency deployed eight incident management teams to support fire suppression efforts across the state in 2015. The Oregon National Guard supplied several helicopters and flight crews, other equipment and 375 personnel to form 18 fire hand crews. The state fire marshals' office provided three structural fire teams, the Department of Corrections provided 330 inmates from 10 institutions to fight fire and support fire camp operations. Resources such as personnel, equipment and aircraft came in from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, 27 states and two Canadian Provinces.

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